

Southern Appalachian Creature Feature Podcasts

Mountain Golden Heather Monitoring

Greetings and welcome to the Southern Appalachian Creature Feature.

Despite the elevation, it was quite hot, as the midday sun fell on the dry ridge running along Linville Gorge. We were there to monitor mountain golden heather, a threatened plant. Despite being a Wednesday, an off day for outdoor recreation, during three three or four hours we were in the sun counting plants, several people hiked by on the trail that bisected our work area.

One of the conservation challenges facing mountain golden heather is trampling. The plant is unfortunate enough to grow in places that are also popular with hikers – open, high elevation sites with good views – and as a result, it can often get trampled by good people, enjoying the outdoors, who just want to soak in a wide-open view.

One simple tool public land managers use to protect species like mountain golden heather is closing specific, discrete areas to foot traffic. When you're out enjoying public lands, and you come across an "area closed" sign, it may mean that somewhere behind that sign is an imperiled plant threatened, in part, by trampling.

When you come to these signs, please join thousands of visitors to public lands in heeding their message, and helping protect some of our rarest species.

For WNCW and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, this is Gary Peeples.